



ARTPOWER!

MULTI-ARTS SEASON 2013-2014

EMERSON STRING QUARTET

Thursday January 9, 2014 / 8pm
Department of Music's
Conrad Prebys Concert Hall

Sponsors

Amnon and Lee Ben-Yehuda
Joan Jordon Bernstein
Alexa Kirkwood Hirsch

ARTISTS

Eugene Drucker, violin
Philip Setzer, violin
Lawrence Dutton, viola
Paul Watkins, cello

PROGRAM

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart:

String Quartet No. 16 in E flat major, K. 428
(K.421b)

Dmitry Shostakovich:

String Quartet No. 11 in F minor, Op. 122

INTERMISSION

Ludwig van Beethoven:

String Quartet No. 8 in E minor
("Rasumovsky No. 2"), Op. 59/2



PROGRAM NOTES

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART:

String Quartet No. 16 in E flat major,
K. 428 (K.421b)

When Haydn brought forth his Op. 33 string quartets in 1781, neither he nor Mozart had composed string quartets in almost a decade. According to Haydn, his Op. 33 quartets were composed in "an entirely new and special manner." Most notably in these works, Haydn departed from a texture combining melody and accompaniment and created a four-part musical discourse in which each instrument participates in the thematic development. Mozart was inspired to return to quartet composition in 1782, and during the next eight years, he wrote his ten great string quartets. The first six of these were published as a set and dedicated to Haydn. They are known as the "Haydn" Quartets. Mozart composed the "Haydn" Quartets between 1782 and 1785. A few years earlier, the young composer had begun to attend gatherings hosted by Baron Gottfried van Swieten, a collector of scores from the Baroque period. During these gatherings, the professional and amateur musicians performed music by Handel and J.S. Bach. Many of these works emphasized contrapuntal techniques and demonstrated a



consummate mastery of the art of counterpoint. Mozart's partaking in these gatherings helped to hone his contrapuntal skills.

In his book *Mozart: A Cultural Biography*, Robert Gutman observes: "If Swieten's portfolios revealed to Mozart the riches of Bach's and Handel's contrapuntal art, Joseph Haydn's recent work taught him how to take personal possession of it. In the past, he had most often restricted his use of counterpoint to interjecting its texture and flavor into his compositions as a diversifying element, but now, putting himself into spiritual apprenticeship to Haydn, he strove to acquire a complete command of the polyphonic discipline...to mould a venerable vocabulary and grammar into a language speaking in his authentic voice; to make baroque traditions serve the contemporary idiom of the sonata and thematic transformation."

Mozart's "Haydn" Quartets incorporate Haydn's innovations within a bold and unique style that conveys Mozart's personality. Mozart had long excelled at assimilating other styles and techniques, synthesizing them into his own musical style, which, as the composer matured, as Cliff Eisen has aptly stated, was "distinguished by its melodic beauty, its formal elegance and its richness of harmony and texture." When Haydn heard the last three quartets of the set that would be dedicated to him, he exclaimed to the composer's father, Leopold Mozart: "Before God and as an honest man, I tell you that your son is the greatest composer known to me either in person or in

name. He has taste, and what is more, the most profound knowledge of composition." Mozart responded with his famous dedication, writing to Haydn that the quartets were the "fruits of a long and laborious effort."

The Quartet in E-flat major, K. 428, was composed in 1783. Mozart's development with regard to contrapuntal technique and his fusion of polyphonic elements and sonata principles are immediately apparent in this Quartet. It is also one of Mozart's most harmonically advanced works.

The E-flat Quartet opens with a movement in sonata form. The first part of the angular and chromatic main theme is presented in unison, after which the movement continues with a rich variety of textures. The tender slow movement is set in A-flat, and some critics have drawn attention to similarities in the spirit of this movement to the second movement of Haydn's Quartet in E-flat major, Op. 20, No. 1, which is also in A-flat. Mozart's second movement, however, is particularly sophisticated in its use of imitative textures and chromaticism. The third movement is a relatively lengthy minuet and trio. It is followed by the finale, a movement that combines aspects of rondo and sonata forms, a hybrid structure invented by Haydn. This is not the only homage to Haydn in the finale. In this movement, Mozart draws upon Haydn's penchant for humor, strong rhythmic components and folk elements. The finale incorporates aspects of the contredanse, with its fast pace and duple meter.

DMITRY SHOSTAKOVICH:

String Quartet No. 11 in F minor, Op. 122

Shostakovitch's Eleventh Quartet, opus 122, was written in 1966 and is dedicated to the memory of the recently departed Vassily Shirinsky, a close friend and colleague and the second violinist of the Beethoven Quartet. This important ensemble, formed in 1923, played the premieres of all of Shostakovitch's quartets except the first and last. His quartets were written with these players in mind, and

their contribution to his involvement with quartet writing cannot be overestimated. The Eleventh Quartet might be subtitled *"The Little Theater of Dmitri Shostakovich"* (with apologies to Jean Renoir). Its seven short and interconnected movements contain overtones of opera, film score and ballet (mediums well explored in their own rights by the composer), and, as with so many of the Shostakovich's late works, are full of references to his own pieces as well as those of others. Although small in scale, the dramatic scope of this little human comedy is deep and, ultimately, tragic.

The first movement, *"Introduction,"* contains the seeds of all the material to follow. It opens with a graceful violin solo, which assumes the feeling of a protagonist in the story that unfolds. The music of the other instruments flows directly from this solo.

The second movement, *"Scherzo,"* is basically a dance-like, two-part invention. Its elements are of the simplest shape and create a mood which veers between the childlike and the deeply ironic. The music gradually slows and flows, unbroken, into the third movement, *"Recitative."* This overtly operatic sequence seems to be forming actual phrases of speech and illustrates the profoundly direct nature of Shostakovich's art. A very slowed-down version of the *"Scherzo"* theme provides a short contrasting section. The very brief fourth and fifth movements, *"Etude"* and *"Humoresque"* respectively, form a pair. In the former, an unbroken stream of fast notes is counterpointed against slower and heavier material reminiscent of melodies in the First Cello Concerto - a piece describing an individual's struggle against the forces that would crush him (that is, Shostakovich's situation as a creative artist in a brutally oppressive society) - and also echoes the second movement of the Tenth Symphony, a musical portrait of Stalin. In the *"Humoresque,"* this slower level is accompanied by a ridiculous and unvarying alternation of two notes. These two movements, each with its dual levels - slow, even agonizing strife side-by-side with frivolity -

could be interpreted as the picture of a musician (Shirinsky, perhaps, or the composer) attempting to cope with intense political and personal pressures with grace (fourth movement) and humor (fifth).

The sixth movement, *"Elegy,"* is the quartet's center of gravity (no pun intended). In it, the *"Scherzo"* theme is mutated into a more-than-passing resemblance to the Funeral March of the *"Eroica"* Symphony - perhaps a specific reference to the Beethoven Quartet and their departed colleague.

The last movement is entitled *"Conclusion,"* and I cannot help but think that this refers to more than just the end of this particular piece. All the themes of the quartet are woven together in a masterly polyphonic fabric which, indeed, seems like a whole life passing in front of our ears. Finally, the first violin takes up its opening solo from the first movement, much slowed down, which ascends, ever slower, coming to rest on a high C, held as all the other music fades away: It is a picture of death, at once peaceful, final, and disturbing.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN:

String Quartet No. 8 in E minor
 ("Rasumosky No. 2"), Op. 59/2
Program notes by Archiboldus Holden

The Quartet in E minor, Op. 59 No. 2 is the second in the series of three commissioned by Count Rasumovsky in 1806. At the beginning of the Allegro, Beethoven suddenly repeats the terse opening statement a half tone higher, in the Neapolitan key of F, without preparation and after the home key is barely established. This creates an unsettled, tense feeling which permeates the movement. There is much sixteenth-note motion and hardly any real themes, only motivic fragments often punctuated by silence. The second subject, though in major, is hardly relaxed, being propelled by restless accompaniment. In the development, Beethoven moves through thirteen keys, with passing harmonies in between, before arriving at E minor for the recapitulation. The



return, coming after a series of fortissimo trills, is somewhat disguised by the filling in of the spaces between the original opening chords. Even the coda, with its brief calm, moves through several keys. A crescendo builds toward the end in a flurry of notes, and the main theme, heard previously only in pianissimo, is played fortissimo in the final bars.

Carl Czerny, a close friend of Beethoven's, wrote that "The Adagio, in E Major, in the second Rasumovsky Quartet, occurred to him while he was contemplating the starry sky and thinking of the music of the spheres." There exists no proof of this other than the extraordinary quality of the movement itself. The tension in the first movement is transcended here by timeless ecstasy, an other-worldly atmosphere. The opening hymn is soon punctuated by quiet dotted rhythms and the sound of celestial mechanics, if one believes Czerny's statement. At the end of the second theme this dotted rhythm finally gives way to leisurely triplets, which spin slowly like orbiting planets. After the development, which contains more contrasting material and some very dramatic moments, the recapitulation is slightly extended within itself, contributing to the timelessness even more. The hymn makes an impassioned appearance in new harmonic guise, and the triplets float down through the instruments at the end, leaving the cello murmuring contentedly.

The third movement is in two sections, the first

Allegretto, the second a trio titled Maggiore and bearing the obligatory Russian Theme. The melancholy Allegretto is obsessed by a single rhythmic idea, heard in the first measure. Only occasionally is this idea against it which tend to confuse the ear. The trio is a lively fugue on the Russian tune first heard in the viola against a triplet countersubject. At the climax, the theme is played fortissimo in canon by all four instruments. Beethoven indicates that the Allegretto should be repeated twice and the Maggiore once, perhaps to properly proportion this movement to the others.

The Finale opens with a burst in C Major, only to turn to the home key of E minor in the seventh bar. This unusual harmonic trick starting on the flatted sixth degree and fooling the listener, rekindles a charged atmosphere. Dotted rhythms in both melody (page 2/ Beethoven, Op. 59 No. 2) and accompaniment create a martial, even relentless mood. The second subject provides contrast; it is a steady stream of even notes, played legato, and utilizes the Neapolitan harmony so central to the first movement. The coda is long and dramatic, with fortissimo explosions in the Neapolitan key. The main theme is finally heard in fortissimo, as in the end of the first movement, and the work concludes with a dashing Presto.

**SUNDAY,
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EMERSON STRING QUARTET

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With the arrival of cellist Paul Watkins in May of 2013, the Emerson Quartet has embarked on a remarkable new journey – one filled with freshness, warmth and impressive accolades – all within its first ten performances. Mr. Watkins, a distinguished soloist, award-winning conductor, and dedicated chamber musician, has joined the ensemble for its 37th season, and his dedication and enthusiasm have already infused the Emerson Quartet with a rich tone and vibrant sense of humor. "One of the characteristics of the Emerson Quartet is that its players (the violinists Eugene Drucker and Philip Setzer and the violist Lawrence Dutton in addition, now, to Mr. Watkins) all have the ability and the instruments to produce a sweet and glossy sound – but do so sparingly. Instead, they establish a chromatic scale of timbres that range from dry and tart over clean and zesty all the way to lustrous and singing. Listening to them pass tiny rhythmic motifs around the group, I was struck by how evenly calibrated these timbres were." The New York Times

The Quartet's season began in Montreal followed by performances in Tianjin and Taiwan. Summer festival performances included Caramoor, Aspen, Ravinia, Tanglewood, Mostly Mozart and a residency at the Norfolk Music

Festival. Late summer dates at European festivals brought them to Berlin, Augsburg, Ascona, Città di Castello and [Humblebaek,] Denmark, for two appearances at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art. In a season of over 80 quartet performances, mingled with the Quartet members' individual commitments, Emerson highlights feature numerous concerts on both coasts and throughout North America. Multiple tours of Europe include dates in Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, France, Poland and the UK. The Emerson continues its series at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC for its 34th season and gives a three-concert series in Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall, which is focused on the last five quartets of Shostakovich juxtaposed with Schubert's *"Death and the Maiden"* and the last quartets of Mendelssohn and Britten. The unifying theme in these programs is the preoccupation with death. In May and June 2014, the Quartet will tour South America, Asia and Australia.

As an exclusive artist for SONY Classical, the Emerson recently released *Journeys*, its second CD on that label, featuring Tchaikovsky's *Souvenir de Florence* and Schoenberg's *Verklaerte Nacht*. Future recordings are planned with Mr. Watkins. Formed in 1976 and based in New York City, the Quartet took its name from the American poet and philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson.

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